



## **We Must Not Repeat the Mistakes of 1986**

### ***Any Immigration Reform Must Secure Our Borders***

**by John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison**

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As your U.S. senators, we have been heavily involved in the congressional debate on immigration reform for several years. We have taken a leadership role on this issue because we represent a state that uniquely benefits from the contributions of legal immigrants but is also uniquely vulnerable to the dangers of illegal immigration. Throughout this process, our principles have been clear and consistent: We must secure our borders, and we cannot encourage illegal behavior through amnesty.

Last week, the Bush administration, along with a small group of senators, announced a compromise immigration bill that would take a necessary first step in improving border security. We did not join in the announcement. While our efforts had a positive influence, we were not convinced that the proposal guarantees repair of our broken system. We are particularly concerned that we may be repeating the mistakes of the failed 1986 national amnesty.

As of late Friday, the actual text of the "grand compromise" had not yet been published. Major questions remain about details of the plan and how it would work. We believe the bill – which was negotiated privately – deserves a full public airing before it's considered.

The bill promises some long-term positive changes, including significant border security measures, an end to chain migration and a switch to green card distribution based on merit.

But many problems have not been satisfactorily addressed. For example, we must make certain that convicted criminals are not eligible for any legalization, and that if these individuals attempt to stay here, they are arrested and promptly deported.

We must ensure that only those who have played by the rules – and not those engaged in identity theft – receive Social Security benefits. This proposal would enable illegal immigrants to collect Social Security benefits for the time they were unlawfully in our country. At a time when we are already facing major shortfalls in our ability to pay benefits for future retirees, this represents an unfair burden on the American taxpayer. We must end the rampant document fraud that plagues our workplaces today and do it in a way that is legally enforceable.

Some of our colleagues, sensing the fragile nature of the proposed compromise, want to rush it through Congress immediately. This would be a major mistake.

It is too important and too complicated to rush. The legislation requires extended Senate debate, with full opportunity for public input and criticism, and an open process for amendments to strengthen its provisions.

In 1986, Congress approved a similar compromise plan that, in return for amnesty for most immigrants here illegally, promised an end to porous borders and disregard for our laws. Those promises were not honored. The amnesty legislation instead actually encouraged further disrespect for our laws and led directly to the situation we face today.

As the bill reaches the Senate floor this week, our goal will be restoring the integrity of our borders, providing guest workers with opportunity, not amnesty, and preserving our social security for all who legally qualify. Our contributions to the debate will continue to be positive and constructive.

Our country needs immigration reform. We must ensure that it's done and done correctly.

*Sen. Cornyn is Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee.*

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